

## Rochester Institute of Technology RIT Scholar Works

---

Theses

Thesis/Dissertation Collections

---

1999

# The Use of customer complaints as a positive attribute for hotel development: The Marriot Thruway Hotel, Rochester, NY

Patcharin Buranabanyat

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarworks.rit.edu/theses>

---

### Recommended Citation

Buranabanyat, Patcharin, "The Use of customer complaints as a positive attribute for hotel development: The Marriot Thruway Hotel, Rochester, NY" (1999). Thesis. Rochester Institute of Technology. Accessed from

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Thesis/Dissertation Collections at RIT Scholar Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses by an authorized administrator of RIT Scholar Works. For more information, please contact [ritscholarworks@rit.edu](mailto:ritscholarworks@rit.edu).

**The Use of Customer Complaints as a Positive Attribute for Hotel Development:**

**The Marriott Thruway Hotel, Rochester, NY**

By  
**Patcharin Buranabanyat**

A project submitted to the  
Faculty of the School of Food, Hotel and Tourism Management  
at  
Rochester Institute of Technology  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree  
of  
Master of Science

February, 1999

**ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY**  
**School of Food, Hotel and Travel Management**  
**Department of Graduate Studies**

**M.S. Hospitality-Tourism Management**  
**Presentation of Thesis/Project Findings**

Name: Patcharin Buranabanyat Date: 2/25/99 SS#: \_\_\_\_\_

Title of Research: The Use of Customer Complaints as a Positive Attribute  
for Hotel Development : The Marriott Thruway Hotel in Rochester NY

Specific Recommendations: (Use other side if necessary.)

Thesis Committee: (1) Dr. Edward B Stockham (Chairperson)

(2) \_\_\_\_\_

OR (3) \_\_\_\_\_

Faculty Advisor: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Credits Approved: 02 Credits

2/25/99 \_\_\_\_\_

Date Committee Chairperson's Signature

3/8/99 \_\_\_\_\_  
Date Department Chairperson's Signature

**Note: This form will not be signed by the Department Chairperson until all corrections, as suggested in the specific recommendations (above) are completed.**

cc: Departmental Student Record File - Original  
Student

ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY  
School of Food, Hotel and Travel Management  
Department of Graduate Studies

M.S. Hospitality-Tourism Management  
**Statement Granting or Denying Permission to Reproduce Thesis/Project**

The author of a thesis or project should complete one of the following statements and include this statement as the page following the title page.

Title of thesis/project: The Use of Customer Complaints as a Positive Attribute  
for Hotel Development : The Marriott Thruway Hotel in Rochester, NY

I, grant, hereby (grant, deny) permission to the  
Wallace Memorial Library of R.I.T., to reproduce the document titled above in  
whole or part. Any reproduction will not be for commercial use or profit:

**OR**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, prefer to be contacted each time a  
request for reproduction is made. I can be reached at the following address:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2-25-99  
Date

Patchar Buranabanyat  
Signature

# **The Use of Customer Complaints as a Positive Attribute for Hotel Development:**

## **The Marriott Thruway Hotel in Rochester, NY**

**By**

**Patcharin Buranabanyat**

### **ABSTRACT**

Criticisms can occur in a hotel all the time when customer expectations do not meet their perceptions. When a hotel guest is dissatisfied, managing the heart of the problem is not always an easy task. There are many ways to collect information from customers regarding their dissatisfaction. Guest satisfaction survey data can be collected often, however, complaints are not fully used if they sit in a complaint-handling center, and not used as a feedback products to help the business improve itself. Some hotels do not pay enough attention to their customers; therefore, customer complaints are still occurring. Do hotels use customer complaints as a database to improve the hotel?

This study investigated how The Marriott Thruway Hotel utilized feedback from customers to understand the customer's expectations and to improve their hotel. The information was collected from interviews and the control charts from 1996-1997. The Service Profit Chain Model, a service recovery program created can be applied to The Marriott Thruway Hotel. This study will help The Marriott Thruway Hotel succeed and grow in the business of customer service.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First of all, I would like to thank my parents for their love and support. I would like to thank Dr. Edward B. Stockham for his guidance during this project. I also would like to thank Ms. Susanne M. Moffat for providing information from The Marriott Thruway Hotel. I would like to thank Ms. Karen G. Dobkowski for helping with my project. I would like to thank Nathaporn Sarkarung and Wu Yi-heng for encouraging me. Furthermore, I would like to thank all of the faculty and staff at the School of Food, Hotel and Travel Management for their help and guidance throughout my Masters degree studies.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
ABTRACT	
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	i
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	ii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	iv
LIST OF TABLES.....	v
CHAPTER I : INTRODUCTION	
Introduction.....	1
Background.....	2
Problem Statement.....	3
Purpose.....	3
Significance.....	3
Methodology.....	4
Hypothesis.....	5
Definition of terms.....	5
Scope and Limitations.....	6
Long Range Consequences.....	6
CHAPTER II : LITERATURE REVIEW	
Customer complaint.....	8
Customer expectation.....	11
Exit-Voice and loyalty.....	13
Service recovery.....	15

CHAPTER III: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS .....	19
CHAPTER IV : CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	30
REFERENCES.....	36
APPENDIX A	
The interview questions.....	39
A summary of the interview question and the staff responding the questions....	40
APPENDIX B	
Marriott's control charts from 1996-1997.....	41
Overall staff efficiency.....	42
Friendly front desk clerk.....	43
Check out speed.....	44
Check in speed.....	45
Condition of the restaurant.....	46
Overall bedroom cleanliness.....	47
Overall tub and tile cleanliness.....	48
Overall bathroom cleanliness.....	49
Condition of the bedspread.....	50



## LIST OF FIGURES

	<u>Page</u>
Figure 1: The relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty... ..	14
Figure 2: The service profit chain model... ..	32

## LIST OF TABLES

	<u>Page</u>
Table 1: How often customer complaints... ..	21
Table 2: How to encourage customer feedback... ..	21
Table 3: Customer complaints at the front desk... ..	23
Table 4: Customer complaints at the restaurant... ..	24
Table 5: Customer complaints at housekeeping... ..	25
Table 6: Factors of the problem... ..	26
Table 7: Motivation... ..	28

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### Introduction

Criticisms can occur in a hotel all the time when customer expectations do not meet their perceptions. When a hotel guest is dissatisfied, managing the heart of the problem is not always an easy task.

In a study of hotel customer feedback, it was found that 75% of the respondents were highly likely to express their dissatisfaction when their complaint was not effectively resolved, and, on the average, respondents told 12 people of their bad experiences (Morris 1985).

Lets take for example a state of affairs at a hotel. Frequent complaints arise from rooms not being prepared for guests as soon as they arrive at the hotel, although they had made reservations a week ago. Others may simply be laundry not properly cleaned, or the housekeeper did not change the towel and fix the bed. In spite of this, let's not forget the overwhelming question of every customer, " why do I have to wait for such a long time when checking-in or checking-out? ".

Customers are at the hearts of hotels. Without them there is no revenue for the hotels. Customer complaints are immense pressure for them. To avoid this problem, hotels should take the necessary steps to become customer focused. Hotels need to properly use and translate the complaint data to improve the working process and to eliminate problems corresponding to such complaints.

Hotels should have a service recovery strategy to make customer expectations equal customer perceptions when the service quality has not met customer expectations. Customer

complaints are a good source for improving the quality of hotel. Service recovery works when something goes wrong in the business.

## **Background**

The Rochester Marriott Thruway Hotel in Henrietta, NY was founded in 1974. It is franchise of E.J. Del Monte Corporation. This Cooperation owns all the Marriotts of Rochester which include Marriott Thruway, Marriott Airport Hotel, four Courtyards, four Fairfield Inns and The Marriott Residence Inns. The Marriott Thruway Hotel offers 305 spacious guestrooms and 5 luxurious suites as well as a concierge level providing many personal services and amenities. All accommodations feature individual climate control, color TV with remote control, free cable TV. In all room, there are coffee makers, pay movies and Nintendo. The restaurant in the hotel provides breakfast, lunch and dinner. There is also an enjoyable indoor or outdoor pool, sauna, hot tub, exercise room and putting green.

There are 280 employees, which includes 50% full-time employees and 50% part-time employees.

Customer whose service expectations are not met are not likely to return to the hotel and, additionally, will tell others of their bad experiences (Bitner, Booms, and Mohr 1994).

There are many ways to collect information from customers regarding their dissatisfaction. Survey complaint data can be collected often, however, complaints are not fully used if they sit in a complaint-handling center, and not used as a feedback products to help the business improve itself (Barlow, 1996). Most executives react to complaints as they occur, rather than use them as a free source of information to improve quality. Customer

complaints are one of the most available sources of consumer behavior information, which can become the foundation for quality and service recovery programs.

### **Problem Statement**

Some hotels do not pay enough attention to their customers; therefore, customer complaints are still occurring. When customers are dissatisfied and complain to other customers it can have catastrophic effects on a hotel. Do hotels use customer complaints as a database to improve the hotel? Several studies discovered that many organizations fail to respond to all the complaints they receive (Gilly,1987). This study will touch upon turning the negative images of customer accusations into a strategic tool to improve hotel operation.

### **Purpose**

Complaining customers are disposed to blame bad services on the hotel when things go wrong. The purpose of this study is to analyze how The Marriott Thruway Hotel uses customer complaints as a guideline to understand and solve the problems that cause customer dissatisfaction.

### **Significance**

This study will serve as a guiding tool for hotels to really meet customer expectations or even exceed them. The survey from this study, customer complaint data, will be able to provide hotel managers and employees with information useful for improving their relationships with customers.

To a certain extent, the study may be generalized to most hotel operations to solicit the voice of customer and make practical use of data that seems to be available but conventionally ignored.

A questionnaire will provide the data that is appropriate for obtaining information about customer complaints. However, the bias from customers will happen when customers do not exactly know what they want or which area should be improved. Moreover, they don't realize that their complaints will be useful for them and they feel that it a waste of their time.

## **Methodology**

### Sample Size

The sample population consists of customer complaint files from 1996 to 1997 and the interview with the sales manager, executive manager, restaurant supervisor, front desk staff and a housekeeper.

### Instrument

In this study, the interviews with the Marriott's staff were set up and the hotel's data in 1997 control charts were used as the secondary data. A list of question were developed for use in this interview which served as an outline of existing problems concerning customer satisfaction that currently face the hotel. The primary focus of the interview was on how the hotel solves customer complaint issues. Once the information about the hotel's strategy and efficiency in addressing customer's complaints was acquired; hotel personnel who interact directly with the customer were then interviewed. The interview questions are provided in Appendix A.

## Data Collection

Data collections were obtained from the interview that was conducted from November 16 to November 26, 1998 and the results from the customer satisfaction survey from 1996 to 1997. The survey focused on customer satisfaction in the areas of the front desk, restaurant and housekeeping.

## Data Analysis

The objective here is to contrast and analyze the management perspective with those of the personnel. Collectively, this information will help provide the framework for the cascade of events initiated by management down to personnel whenever a particular customer complaint erupts.

## **Hypothesis**

The results from this study will show that the hotel did not use the customer complaint surveys as a tool to improve their defects. Results from the interviews were summarized in the table in order to make comparison between the groups of respondents.

Making the complaint widely known can help in preventing the problem in the future. Evaluation after customer complaint surveys can predict what will happen in the future or what will not happen in the future and how customer satisfaction can be created from using the customer complaint tools.

## **Definition of terms**

*Doing the right things:* working as efficiently and accurately as possible which adds value to customers either internal or external, avoiding the wasted effort required to correct mistakes (White, ML, 1993).

*Planned service recovery*: a thought out, planned process for returning aggrieved customers to a state of satisfaction with the organization after a service or product has failed to live up to expectations (Zemke, R. & Bell, C, 1990).

*Service outcome*: is the solution the customers find satisfactory when they get a service need met (Parasuraman, A., Berry, L., & Zeithaml, A., 1970).

*Service process*: part of the customer's overall satisfaction with the transaction. It means what the customer experiences while the need is being met such as the waiting time, the paperwork and the courtesy of employees (Parasuraman, A., Berry, L., & Zeithaml, A., 1970).

*Exit-Voice Theory*: a theory is proposed that predicts and explains variation in voice, exit, and negative word-of-mouth behaviors (Singh, 1990).

*Voice of the customer*: the process of learning identifying customer needs, structuring the needs and providing priorities for customer needs (Griffin & Hauser 1993).

## Scope and Limitations

Every hotel business cannot avoid customer complaints. To win a customer back and create customer loyalty, hotels will try to provide the service efficiently the second time. This study focuses on (1) what type of customers complaints arise in the areas of the front desk, restaurant and housekeeping, (2) does the hotel use those customer complaints as a strategy to improve the hotel. The limitations of this study are The Marriott's guests who filled out the questionnaires or the comment cards in 1996 and 1997 and the Marriott staffs who were interviewed during November 16 – November 26, 1998.



## **Long Range Consequences**

This study will show how a hotel can use feedback from their customers as a strategy to solve or improve customer satisfaction and retain customer loyalty. The impact for this study will be valuable for hotels. They can use the results of their customer complaint data to improve their hotel.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

In the last decade, customers appear to be making decision about products not only based on the characteristics of the product but also based on the quality of their transactions with the supplier. Customers evaluate a hotel's environment from the product quality or service excellence and how the business performs in the wider world. Customers complain when they feel dissatisfied with products or services. Understanding customer's expectations is a key for delivery of excellent services. Customer complaint data can be very useful for identifying problems that cause customer defections (DeSouza, 1992). Listening to the voice of the customer and acting on grievances can help retain not only the customers who complain, but also more importantly, those who did not.

There is an activity in which a business can engage to appeal to a customer is complaint regarding a perceived service failure (Gronroos, 1988). Service recovery process or putting it right for the employees is crucially important to change angry and frustrated customers into loyal ones.

#### **Customer complaints**

Knowing which elements are most possible to earn compliments or complaints can assist a hotel industry in obtaining guest satisfaction. Top management usually operates customer feedback as an exception-reporting mechanism to analyze weaknesses to be corrected or strengths to be approved.

A complaint has the relationship between customer expectation that has not met customer requirement. Most complainants want what they were denied or what they expected to get from the providers. Numerous research studies recommend that businesses can create a feeling of reciprocity by taking the complainants seriously and offering something special such as a discount, an apology, a free gift or a coupon for the next time. Lewis (1982) research studied what customer suggested to hotel management regarding what it would take to satisfy them. Forty-six percent would be happy with a discount on their expected payment, twenty-five percent shows that complementary room and meals would be a reasonable resolution; twenty percent would have been pleased with management responsiveness, excellence in communication, or a more pleasant relationship.

Customers dissatisfied with products or services have the opportunity to complain, and the business should be responsible for these complaints. When businesses listen to the complaints, they learn not only how to recover products or services to meet customer requirements but also how to train an employee to serve the customer. Top management should begin by listening to customers, learning their requirements and desires and how customers conceive the business's offerings.

When customers feel dissatisfied with services, they will either say something or they can walk away and will not come back again. If they walk away, they will not give a chance for the business to fix their dissatisfaction. On the other hand, complaining customers are willing to employ the services again which is a gift for the business (Barlow, 1996). To consider complaints as a gift, customers have a right to complain even though their complaints are unreasonable, stupid or cause inconveniences. The idea that a complaint is a gift works when someone complains and takes it as something of value.

Complaining customers tell the businesses what their problems are. Therefore, it helps the business fix the problems and encourages the customers to come back. There are many ways to hear customer complaints. Comment cards are put in the guestroom. There is rarely an incentive for guests to respond, on the other hand, quality and the number of the responses might not provide a true measure of customer feelings. However, it is a low-cost measure of procuring customer feedback. Toll-free numbers (800) are the most efficient ways for obtaining feedback from customer complaints. They are faster and cheaper for gaining information. Focus groups seem to be a popular way to earn customer feedback. It can be used to learn how business, products or services are perceived by customers and their reaction. Moreover, where businesses want to get additional information they can get it from focus groups. Nevertheless, this can be exorbitant cost. Customer surveys display customers opinions or perceptions about the business, products or services. The problems with this particular way are that businesses have invested a significant amount of time and money.

Listening to a customer is not an easy task. Employee training becomes a top management priority. Employees must have the skills to deal with the customer complaints.

Customers will repurchase products or services when their expectations meet their perceptions. Andreassen and Best in 1977 revealed that 30-53% of customers who have experienced problems with one of seven services they purchased were satisfied with the resolution. Only 50-67% of customers who experienced difficulties with one of five service companies was satisfied with the outcome (Berry, Parasuraman, 1991). In service, they believes that doing it right the second time in ways that surpass customer's expectations may return more elevated satisfaction levels than services provided things right the first time. Hunt and Cooke, 1990 found that 54% of customer satisfaction will buy again if they believe their complaint has been resolved. Only 19% will repurchase if their complaint will be heard

but not resolution. Nine percent of the complaints will buy again even a complaint is not heard. Satisfaction with the complaint feedback will lead to more repurchase intentions for the customer.

There is a relationship between complaint behavior and word-of-mouth. Word-of-mouth can influence businesses both positively and negatively. The best way to control negative word of mouth is to encourage complaint efficiency by handling they complaints. In general, if customer complaints have not been resolved, a business may not have enough to stop negative word of mouth. They will communicate their bad experience with their friends. Nonetheless, the efficient handling of complaints from businesses will decrease negative word of mouth and positive word of mouth may be created. Negative word of mouth provides a business with the opportunity to satisfy customers who have had bad experiences and potentially to prevent unfavorable word of mouth (Gilly, 1987).

Complaint behavior is often affiliated with customer benefit expectation. Consequently, it is useful to mediate in order to give the customer the type of response will satisfy the complaint expectations. Customers who complain do not receive responses from a business are less satisfied than those customers who do.

### **Customer expectations**

Understanding customer expectations and responding to customer are a key for delivering service excellence. Service excellence find its roots in meeting customer needs (Madsen, 1993). The essential quality of service excellence is to delight the customer and exceed his or her expectations by listening to the customer, handling complaints, and maintaining friendly service. Moreover, addressing customer satisfaction through face-to-face interactions and looking for ways to make customers feel special makes even more

excellent service to the customers. Successful quality service leads to positive word-of-mouth advertising.

Customer service expectations can be categorized into five elements as follows: reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy and responsiveness. Although reliability is the most important customer service expectation element in meeting customer expectations since businesses are supposed to provide the service they promise to provide, the other elements especially assurance, tangibles, empathy and responsiveness are also most significant in exceeding customer expectations (Berry, Parasuraman, Zeibaml, 1991). In effect, customers insist on accuracy, and dependable businesses that provide the service they promised to provide. For example, hotels can exceed customer's expectations by having rooms ready in time, cleanliness in the hotel and guaranteed rooms.

Customer expectation has two levels that are desired and adequate. Desired service level is the service that a customer expects to receive. Customer finds acceptable service in adequate service level and it seems to be influenced by specific situations; therefore, it is more changeable than desired service expectations. Recognizing both levels and understanding customer expectations can guide top management and close the gap between expectations and perceptions or even surpass expectations. Building relationships, being reliable, managing promises are the tools for creating customer exceeded expectation.

Zemke (1994) has identified five things that customers expect when problems arise. Receiving an apology is most powerful when delivered in person. It goes a long way toward calming an aggravated customer. The customer will respond kindly when he/she is offered a fair fix for the problem if the service provider offers a rational explanation, and demonstrates sensitivity and concern. Customers expect to be treated in a way that suggests the business cares about the problem, about fixing the problem, and about the customer's

comfort. Also, customers expect to receive some value-added atonement for their convenience and they want the service provider to keep the promises since they would rather be given bad news than to be lied to.

### **Exit-Voice and Loyalty**

Exit-Voice Theory by Hirschman (1970) is another tool for understanding customers. This theory relates to situations in which customers become dissatisfied with services or products provided by a business. Exit-Voice is feedback to service failure of business. Exit is when the customers stop repurchasing or coming back to a business. Voice implies that customers complain their dissatisfaction directly to the business. In Hirschman's terms, exit is generally an escape from an objectionable stage of affairs and voice is an endeavor to recovery.

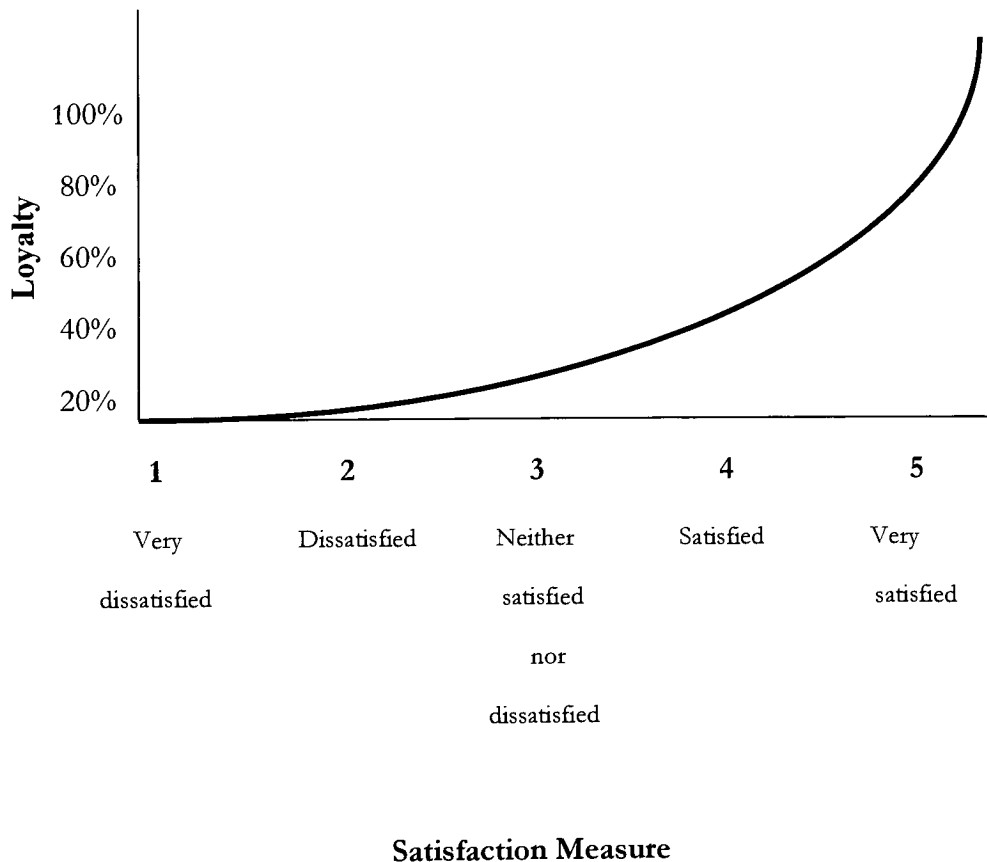
Fornell and Wernerfelt (1987) show that it is usually desirable for a business to employ resources designed to increase the voice of customers to understand why customers are dissatisfied. In a business, customers who did not complain are more likely to exit or never to come back again. Voice complaints also help businesses to improve defection of business and to retain customers. Therefore, encouraging customers to complain can help to retain customers and create loyalty.

There is a relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty (Figure 1). One study showed that customers who indicated on a satisfaction survey that they're completely satisfied are six times more likely to repurchase than those who indicated they were satisfied. Another showed that completely satisfied customers were nearly 42 % more likely to be loyal than those who indicated they were satisfied.

The figure plotting the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty shows very clearly why the hotels need to have customers who are more than merely satisfied. Customers that are not completely satisfied can be allured away easily (Myers, Elissa, Mautlis, 1996). When customer respond with satisfied on a satisfaction survey (level 4), the degree of loyalty drops dramatically, Only when customers indicate they are completely satisfied does loyalty increase to a significant level.

**Figure 1**

**The relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty**





The hotel should retain their customer loyalty when customer complaints happen, because it will cost as much to attract a new customer as it does to retain an existing one.

### **Service Recovery**

Mistakes are a part of every service. Anything can go wrong in every business, including things that affect the business's relationship with its customers. Businesses can suffer from losing a customer because it costs five times more to substitute customers than it does to retain one (Hart, Heskett, Sasser, 1990). Businesses cannot prevent all problems but they can learn recovery from customer complaints. An excellent service recovery can turn frustrated angry customers into loyal customers. There are three possibilities that can occur when customers have had bad experiences with service problems. The first one is the customer's complaint is resolved by the business's response. The customer complains and is not satisfied with the business's response or the customer does not complain to the business (Berry, Parasuraman, Zeithaml, Asdit, et al, 1994).

When the unavoidable problems occur or service failure, customers are dissatisfied. One reason for service failure is service delivery systems are absolutely unready to deal with customer's expectations. In addition, a service business can make things worse if they do not put efficient and trained employees, or enough of them, in problem resolution positions and if they do not give enough authority to employees for solving problems immediately. Likewise, faulty products, waiting times, and poor service from employees can effect customer satisfaction.

Doing the right things right the first time works best; however, if businesses do not do it, they definitely have to do it right the second time. Customers whose problems with a business were solved satisfactorily or exceeded expectations are as satisfied as those who had

no problem in the first period (Zemke, Bell, 1990). Customers who complain and have their complaints satisfied seem to repurchase products or services more than are customers who have experienced no problems with the business, products or services. On the other hand, some businesses that do not respond effectively to customer complaints compound the service failure since they have failed the customers twice. When customer dissatisfaction does occur, the business should have the opportunity to take some remedial action that will not only calm a dissatisfied customer; but also, produce a satisfied one. Service recovery refers to those actions designed to alter the negative perceptions of dissatisfied customers.

Every business should have a plan for service recovery. It can prevent a dissatisfied customer from spreading the negative advertising of unhappy customers to others. From knowing customer's expectations and by listening to the voice of the customer a planned service recovery can be conveyed. Service recovery concerns both service outcome and service process. Generally, customers do not expect service providers to be perfect but they care about how the business is doing and how satisfied they are.

Service recovery does not arise by an accident. A good recovery is successful only through a set of systems, operations and actions that are assiduously planned, consistently refined and carefully performed.

There are many procedures to erect the capability of service recovery from a service failure as following:

Break the silence (Hart, Heskett, Sasser, 1990): businesses cannot solve a customer's problems or service failure until a customer complains. Businesses should willingly comment and obtain feedback from customers. Therefore, all excellent service recoveries start with identifying the painful spots. There are many ways to encourage silent customers to

complain so a business can win them back. The simplest way is to make it easy for them to complain via comment cards, toll-free number and a web site.

Quality function deployment (QFD): It is a technique for accomplishing to translate the voice of customer into product or service specifications. The heart of QFD is a large matrix that relates what customers require with how products and services will be designed and produced in order to satisfy those requirements.

Response fast: ascertain and clarify a problem quickly that the customer's concern is the business' concern. Customers who have bad experiences will tell approximately eleven people about it; on the other hand, customers who have had good experiences will only tell six people (Hart, Heskett, Sasser, 1990). Responding to dissatisfied customers illustrates the need to build a long-term relationship with that customer is concerned by the business. In a commonplace; the business's first priority should be to complete the service immediately.

Train employee: An employee is an internal customer and they are the only people who can assess internal service quality. They are the first to know about problems and are in the best position to determine what can be done to satisfy the customer. Internal service quality can affect external service quality. Therefore, the businesses must not only train the people who interact directly with customers but also empower to them. Employees training can work on developing communication skills and creative thinking needed to deal with petulant customers. Recovering training should emphasize on teaching employees how to make decisions when problems occur and developing an awareness for customer's concerns. The training program should be designed using real-life situations and role-playing.

Empowerment: Staff with the power and authority to solve the problems or to make the wrong right soon after the wrong is discovered is an essential factor for effective customer satisfaction.

The logistics or service recovery has three elements which are; resolving the problem immediately so the customer is satisfied, preventing a reoccurrence of the same problem in the future, and planning responses for reappearing breakdowns that are unavoidable. Service recovery is fundamental to meeting excellence in service; therefore, it should be a part of every service business strategy.

## CHAPTER III

### RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

In the hotel business, success depends on satisfying customers with good services. Customers are satisfied with the service or the product when their perception meets their expectation. To meet the customer's expectations one must know what are the perceptions. Feedback from the customers can help the hotel to design successful service that creates lifetime customers.

Getting feedback from customers can minimize the complaint problems. Some hotels do not use or pay attention to the feedback from customers, which increases and sustains customer complaints.

My analysis of this study is based on interviews with Marriott's employees during the period of November 6 – November 16, 1998. Additional information for analysis was also obtained from The Marriott's control charts from 1996 to 1997 (Appendix B).

I conducted interviews with the sales manager, executive manager, restaurant supervisor, front desk staff and a housekeeper. The interview questions created were as shown in Appendix A. From the interview questions, I tried to find out what type of customer complaints were found at the front desk, restaurant and housekeeping and how they were solved. Those questions are based on Marriott's control charts from 1996 to 1997. During the period between July 21 – September 13, 1997, I found the percent of customer satisfactions for every control chart shown in Appendix B. dropped to the lower control limit. What happened to The Marriott Thruway Hotel during that period of time?

As listed in Appendix A, a summary of the interview questions and the staff's responses to the questions were analyzed by using the following six variables: customer complaints, customer feedback, areas of customer complaints, factors of the problems, system and solution to recover customer complaints. Each category were created in order to organize data from the interviews during November 16 – December 16, 1998 and the control charts between 1996-1997 and those categories are discussed to provide a clear understanding of the analysis.

Customer complaints had been rising everyday during the interviews period. The basic customer complaint areas were from the front desk, restaurant and housekeeping. The guests complained when there was service failure, non-guarantee reservations and a low standard for guest room conditions. Those problems happened because of the high turnover in the staff and the remodeling of the hotel.

The following sections will analyze the six variables mentioned above.

## **I. Customer complaints**

In the hotel business customer complaints are the most common and they happen daily as shown in Table 1. Feedback from the customers occurs when they interact directly with the service providers, and from indirect contact. Complaints could be minor or very serious. Moreover, some problems are unpredictable depending on the circumstances. The employees have to handle the situation right away.

**Table 1**

**How often customer complaints**

	How often
Customer complaints	Daily

**II. Customer feedback**

The Marriott Thruway Hotel encourage customer feedback by using guest comment cards, suggestion boxes, and guest satisfaction survey sent as a follow-up after the customer leaves the hotel. Those forms are located in the guestroom, at the front desk and are readily accessible to the customers. Guest satisfaction surveys are also mailed to the customers (Table 2).

**Table 2**

**How to encourage customer feedback**

Way to get the feedback from the customers	Located
Guest comment card	Guestroom / front desk
Suggestion boxes	Front desk
Guest satisfaction survey	Mail to the customers

**III. Areas of customer complaints**

Question three was used to determine the areas of customer complaints, which were placed in one of each of the following categories: the front desk, restaurant and housekeeping. Those areas are important to guests. The databases from the areas of the

customer complaints were from the control chart between 1996-1997 and the interview with the Marriott staff.

### **Front desk**

The front desk is at the heart of every hotel. Customers have to come to the front desk to check-in and check-out. In the system, a customer is part of the input in the system when the customer comes into contact with a service provider. Once a customer is placed in the system, the system can be processed by a service provider who uses good communication, technology and deliver service to the customer. The process creates the result of an output, which is to satisfy customers. The service encounter can be compared with the "moment of truth". A service provider has communication with the customer. Moreover, a service provider gives many processes before a customer is satisfied.

Customers interact directly with the front desk. The "moment of truth", which is when customers come into contact with the hotel and get an impression of the quality of its service, happens at the front desk all the time. This impression directly impacts on the customer's perceptions of the hotel services. When customers have a problem, the first place they go to is the front desk. Therefore, the front desk staff should have the knowledge to handle every situation. They can make the first impression and the last impression for the customers.

There were two categories of customer complaints at the front desk (Table 3), which were service failure and reservation problems. Customers complained about the service when the staff did not complete the service properly. Some examples of customer complaints were classified as service failure because of staff inefficiency to handle the situation to satisfy customer, either during the time of check-in or check-out. The reason was



because there were a lot of new staff members and they were new and shy. Therefore, the complaint about the unfriendly front desk clerk was still occurring.

The most popular request at the front desk is for the non-smoking king bedroom. The Marriott Hotel does not have enough non-smoking king bedrooms. Customers did complain most when they requested the room and did not get it because it was not available. This is the biggest complain the hotel gets. When the customer reserves the non-smoking king size bedroom, there is just only one request, the hotel cannot guarantee that the customer will have the non-smoking king size bedroom.

**Table 3**

**Customer complaints at the front desk**

Complaint type	Customer complaint
Service failure	Unfriendly front desk clerk Staff in efficiency Check out speed Check in speed
Product	Non-smoking kingsize bedroom

From the control chart (Appendix B1- B4), the percent of customer satisfaction was not stable with the service or the product at the front desk. The period from July 21- August 16, 1998, the percent of customer satisfaction had dropped to the lower control limit. This low was attributed to new staff working at the front desk. When problems arrived at the front desk, the new staff could not handle the problem because of lack of training. The new staff should have the skill to rectify answers quickly to problems that happened at a particular moment in time.

## Restaurant

The Marriott Thruway Hotel has one restaurant, which is Petals. They offer breakfast, lunch and dinner, and a multi-level lounge to unwind and relax.

The most common customer complaints are slow service and the quality of food such as cold coffee. Other complaints included, the atmosphere of the restaurant was too dark, the condition of the restaurant was old and the customers did not like to sit at the bar for breakfast (Table 4).

Table 4

### Customer complaint at the restaurant

Complaint type	Customer complaint
Service	Slow service
Atmosphere	Condition of restaurant
	Dark
	Old
	Sitting at the bar for breakfast
	Quality of food
Product	Cold coffee

During the period 1996-1997 (Appendix A5), the percent of customer satisfaction was not stable. The period 7 in 1997, which was between July 21 – August 16, 1997, the customer satisfaction line had gone below the average value of the quality. The main reason for the low quality was it was during the time of the restaurant's remodeling. Moreover, they lost the food and beverage manager for six months. Therefore, the staff did not have someone to guide them. Marriott takes its time to recruit people for this position. They did

not want to hire just anybody to fill the position. This position requires a qualified person because the Marriott will only hire someone who can run the business and understand service quality strategy.

## Housekeeping

Housekeeping is another area where customers complain the most. The most common customer complaints were about bathroom cleanliness, tub and tile cleanliness, bedroom cleanliness, and the condition of the bedspread (Table 5). The condition of the bathroom, bed and tub were old.

Table 5

### Customer complaints at housekeeping

Complaint type	Customer complaint
Condition of guest room	Bathroom cleanliness
	Tub and tile cleanliness
	Bedroom cleanliness
	Condition of bedspread

Appendix A6 – A9 shows that during period 8 in 1998, the percent of customer satisfaction had dropped below average. The main reason was because the guest rooms were being remodeled. Moreover, there was a high staff turnover. There was also not enough time to train the new staff.

#### IV. Factors of the problem

The problems in the hotel are due to the lack of staff members and a very high rate of staff turnover. The new staff does not know the area in the hotel because they are new. The new staff will often feel shy and lack the knowledge about the hotel which affects areas such the staff efficiency, check – in speed or check – out speed.

The hotel does not have a lot of full-time people, which also makes it difficult to run the hotel. Fifty percent of the hotel employees are part time. Moreover, they hire a lot of students during summer breaks. Another problem was high relocation. The hotel has a lot of people promoted or relocated. Therefore, there are many vacant positions in many departments (Table 6).

Table 6

##### Factors of the problem

Problem	
Staff	High turnover Promoted Relocated
System	Training Empowerment Motivation

In the training program, the new staff is trained for one week before they provide the service to the customers. They do a lot of hands on training, training them how to interact with guests. The staff has to answer to problems that happen at a specific moment in time. I found that The Marriott Thruway Hotel did not pay attention to continuous

quality training. Team work, guest service and decision making also needs to be put in the training program.

Every staff member will have to make decisions on his or her own. They are empowered to fix the situation and make a customer walk away happy. This could be seen at the front desk.

At the front desk, they have an Empowerment Tracking Form for the staff. When problems occur, the front desk staff is empowered to make a decision right away. After that, the employee has to fill out the empowerment tracking form and provide it to the accounting department, rooms executive and department charged. Every month, the managers have a meeting and they create different teams to analyze those problems.

Staff members have the power to make decision on their own. However, new staff is often not trained enough to make decisions, therefore, cannot make the appropriate decisions.

Every employee has opportunities to become motivated by working at the hotel as shown in table 7. The motivation is very important to the employees. Employees who have less motivation or appreciation are likely to perform poorly on their job. The motivation at The Marriott Thruway Hotel seems to not be high enough to persuade the employees stay.

**Table 7**

**Motivation**

Motivation
House insurance
Staying in Marriott anywhere in the world for \$29 per night
Money bonus box
Referral friends to do banquet, the employee will get 20% of full price
Referral friends or relative to come to work at Marriott and they are good for 90 days \$50 will be yours

**V. How The Marriott Thruway recover customer complaints**

The Marriott Thruway Hotel listened to the voice of the customer. When they had feedback from guest comment cards and suggestion boxes, they used their feedback to solve the problems. Every month, they have a meeting and create the team to solve the problems and get the results. Their policy is flexible depending on the situation.

From the control charts in Appendix B, it is difficult to know what the customers will complain about. The problems are unexpected. It is difficult to predict the exact problems from the surveys. Therefore, this control charts are the guideline for the hotel to know if their customers are satisfied.

When The Marriott Thruway Hotel gets the guest satisfaction survey from the guests, all of the data has be sent to corporate headquarters in Washington, D.C. The corporate headquarters sends the survey results to The Marriott Thruway Hotel and there is a delay in recovery of these important results. This is not a timely way to deal with customer

complaints. Therefore, a fast response from the guest satisfaction survey by The Marriott Thruway Hotel is virtually almost impossible.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### CONCLUSIONS

This study investigated how The Marriott Thruway Hotel utilized feedback from customers to understand the customer's expectations and to improve their hotel. The information was collected from interviews and the control charts from 1996-1997 shows that The Marriott Thruway Hotel does not use the customer feedback as a tool to prevent recurring problems or to improve the hotel. Therefore, the hypothesis that the hotel did not use customer complaints as a positive attribute for improving the hotel is found to be true.

The problems that caused customer complaints were high staff turnover as well the staff's skills being inadequate. Adequate training need to provided to new staff before they serve the customer. When new staff is trying to serve the customers with inadequate training, customer complaints seem to happen.

It is very important to encourage customer feedback and to take measures to collect as much information as possible. This information can provide the trigger for service recovery efforts that are so essential to the achievement of total customer satisfaction. Since the customer's behaviors are to rarely respond to a satisfaction survey it is so hard to know what satisfies customers. Consequently, it is not possible to identify the specific cause of customer complaints.

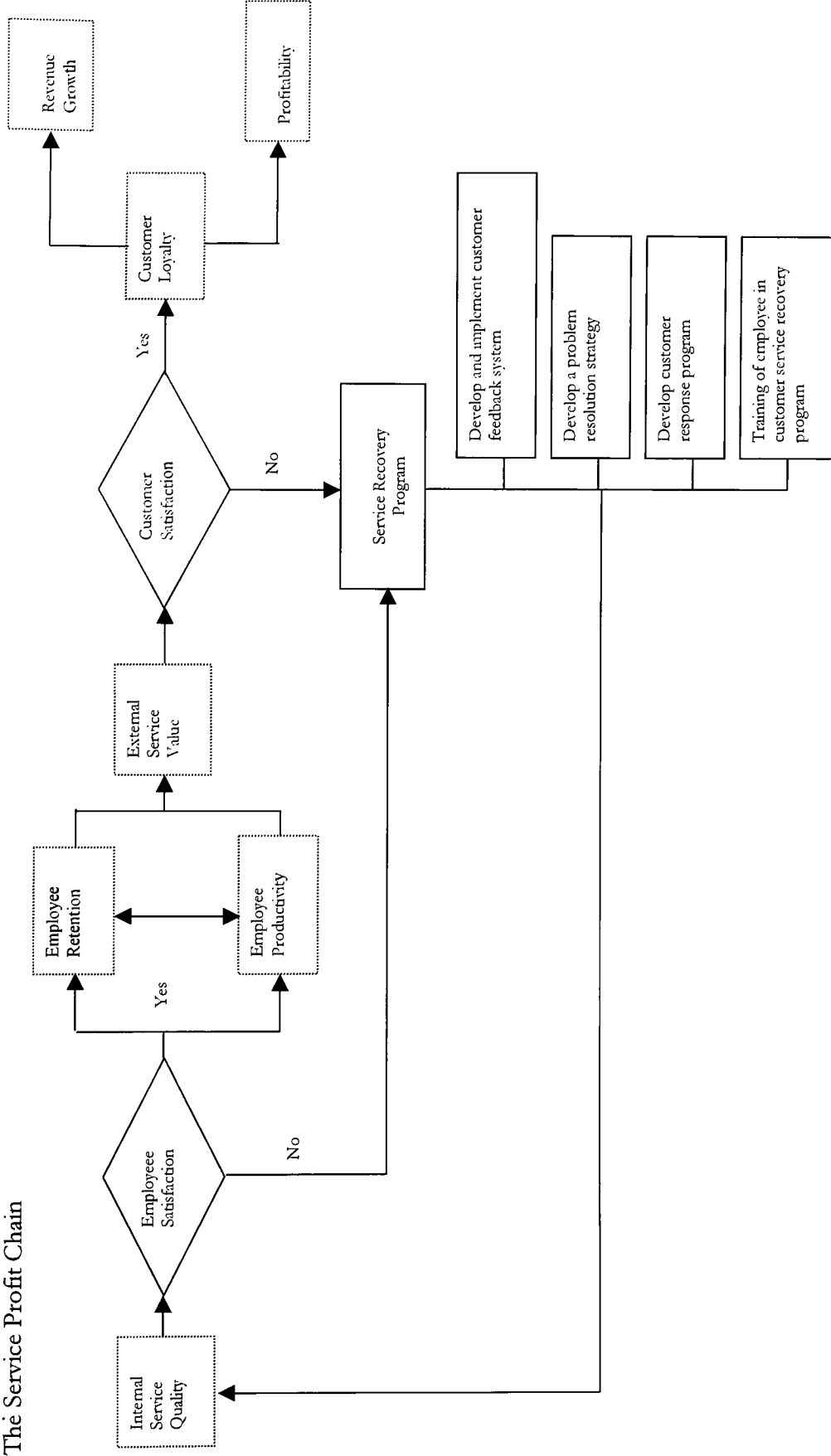


## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Marriott Thruway Hotel should develop a service recovery program which prevents a dissatisfied customer from spreading the word of the hotel's poor service to others. The Service Profit Chain Model by James L. Heskett, W. Earl Sasser, and Leonard A. Schlesinger in 1997, can be adopted for the service recovery program of The Marriott Thruway Hotel. The Service Profit Chain Model shows the interrelationship among profit, growth, customer loyalty, customer satisfaction, the value of goods and services delivered to customers, and employee capability, satisfaction, loyalty and productivity.

Figure 2 shows that the employees are the key to providing external service values. Both employee retention and employee productivity are key factors because of their direct correlation. Employee satisfaction relies on focused delivery of internal service values which is a key to achieve retention and productivity. Internal service values are the environment in which employees work, which includes employee selection and development, rewards and recognition, access to information to serve the customer, workplace technology, and job design. If the employees are not satisfied with internal service quality, a service recovery program should be ready to put it back in the internal service quality. Customer satisfaction is only possible when customers obtain their external service values. On the other hand, if customers are not satisfied with the service, the service recovery program can be used to solve the problem and then send the information back to maintain internal service quality. Customer satisfaction is the key driver of customer loyalty which affects revenue growth and profitability.

Figure 2  
The Service Profit Chain



Adapted from The Links in the Service Profit Chain (James L. Heskett, Thomas o. Jones, Gary W. Loveman, W. Earl Sasser, Jr., and Leonard A. Schlesinger: "Putting the Service-Profit Chain to Work," Harvard Business Review, March-April 1994, p. 166.)

Customers complain happen when their perception does not meet their expectations. Therefore, the service recovery program should be used for winning the customers back.

There are the four steps for helping The Marriott Thruway Hotel overcome complaints and improve service by using the service recovery program as shown in the service profit chain model.

### **Develop and implement customer feedback system**

Encourage customers to give feedback and make it easy for them to do so. Managers who wish to improve a problem or resolve a service must overcome the common customer perception that is the hotel does not really care when things go wrong. The hotel should provide comment cards, suggestion boxes, toll-free telephone numbers or complaints via the internet to gather customer feedback.

### **Develop a problem resolution strategy**

Service employees need specific training on how to deal with angry customers and how to help customers solve service problems. There is an approach for the staff to handle problems. The most important thing for the frontline staff to do is to turn customer complaints into customer satisfaction. A three-stage approach will help the frontline staff handle the problem. The representative of the hotel should begin by offering a heartfelt apology. The form of apology can be as simple as face to face, a telephone call or a personal visit. Secondly, the frontline staffs should have the authority to determine the most appropriate response. For example, the frontline staffs at the front desk should have the authority to get discount for the guests when the guest complains about the cleanliness of the guestroom. Last but not least, when a customer complains about service failure, the frontline staff should give a good rational explanation and demonstrate sensitivity and concern.

## **Develop customer response program**

The hotel often takes too long to respond to unhappy customers. By responding quickly, the hotel conveys a sense of urgency and care. Fast response demonstrates that the customer's concern is the hotel's concern.

## **Training of employee in customer service**

Employees are important to the hotel. If they are satisfied with the internal service quality, they will stay longer with the hotel. According to the service profit chain model, employee satisfaction is the key to make customers satisfied and loyal which affects the growth and profitability in the hotel. If employees are satisfied with the hotel, the high turnover problem will be reduced.

Training is also important to the employees. The emphasis of such a program should be on training customer-contact and claims personnel. Service personnel who deal with dissatisfied customers must understand their critical role. They should be trained not only to deal with the actual service failure, but also to do so in such a way that the customer is satisfied with the way in which the problem is resolved. Firnstahl (1989) describes a customer satisfaction program in which front-line employees were given responsibility and authority to correct problems. When there is a service failure, an employee can do anything to make the customer happy. The Marriott Thruway hotel must train the staffs to interact directly with the customers. The staff closest to the customer are the first to know about problems and are in the best position to determine what can be done to satisfy the customer. Staff turnover was very high in this hotel. Therefore, training is going to be more important because complaints are likely to happen when the new inexperienced staff is trying to serve the customers.

A training program can go a long way in developing the communications skills and creative thinking needed to deal with frustrating customers. Training programs should focus on empowerment, decision making, total quality management and team work. Training must empower the authority, responsibility, and incentives to actually follow through with the customers. Moreover, every staff member should be trained to deal with the customers. The staff should be able to handle tasks from greeting customers and conveying willingness to help in asking the right questions and setting realistic expectations. There can be important benefits from anticipating problems before they arise. Since, customer complaints happen all the time, the staff should be prepared to effectively handle any customer at any given time.

Customer complaint data can be a critical barometer of how well a hotel is serving its customers. This data can also show a hotel what it needs to do to decrease customer complaints and increase customer satisfaction. The key is understanding what customers are saying when they provide various responses.

The Service Profit Chain Model, a service recovery program can be used when customers are dissatisfied. This service recovery program should be used to provide internal service quality ,which will then provide customer satisfaction.

These recommendations will help The Marriott Thruway Hotel succeed and grow in the business of customer service. This is extremely important since customer commitment and loyalty is at the heart of the hotel business.

## REFERENCES

- Andreasen, A.R. and Best, A. (1997) Customer complain- does business respond?  
Harvard Business Review, (July-August), 55, 93-101.
- Barlow, J. (1996) Welcome complaints. Executive Excellence, (November), 13, 11, 20-23
- Barlow, J. and Moller, c. (1942). A Complaint as a gift. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.
- Berry, L.L., Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V., Adsit, D. & etal. (1994) Improving service  
Quality in America: Lessons learned; Execu. The Academy of Management  
Executive, (May), 8, 2, 32-43.
- Brown, S.W. (1997) Service recovery through IT: complaint handling will differentiate  
firms in the future. Marketing Management, (Fall), 6, 3, 25-27.
- Cadotte, E.R. & Turgeon, N. (1998) Key factors in guest satisfaction. Cornell Hotel and  
Restaurant Administration Quarterly, (February), 28, 4, 44-51.
- Cooke, E.F., & Hunt, S. (1990) It's basic but necessary: Listen to the customer.  
Marketing News, (March), 24, 22-24.
- DeSouza, Glenn. (1992) Designing a Customer Retention Plan. The Journal of Business  
Strategy (March/April), 13, 2, 5-6
- Elissa & Myers. (1996) Satisfaction and loyalty. Association Management, (May), 48, 5,  
14-15.
- Fornell, C. & wernerfelt, B. (1987) Defensive marketing strategy by customer complaint  
Management: a theoretical analysis. Journal of Marketing Research, (November), 24,  
4, 337-346.
- Gilly, M.C. (1997) Post complaint processes: from organizational response to repurchase  
behavior. Journal of Consumer Affair, (Winter), 21, 293-313.

- Gregory, E. & Madsen. (1993) Service excellence: A step beyond quality. Bank Marketing, (October), 25, 10, 39-42.
- Griffine, A. & Hauser, J.R. (1993) The voice of the customer. Marketing Science, (Winter), 12,1.
- Hart, C.W.L., Heskett, J.L., & Sasser, W.E., Jr. (1990) The profitable art of service recovery. Harvard Business Review, ( July-August), 68, 148-156.
- Heskett, J.L., Jones, T.O., Loveman, G.W., Sasser, W.E., Jr. & Schlesinger, L.A. (1994) Putting the service-profit chain to work. Harvard Business Review, (March-April), 72, 2, 164 -175.
- Hirschman, Albert O. (1970), Exit, Voice and loyalty. Cambridge: Harvard University.
- Manickas, P.A. & Shea, L.J. (1997) Hotel complaint behavior and resolution: a content analysis. Journal of Travel Research, (Fall), 36, 2, 68-73.
- Parasuraman, A., Berry, L., & Zeitbaml A. (1991) Understand customer expectation of service. Sloan Management Review, (Spring), 32, 39-48.
- Singh, J. (1990) Voice, Exit, and negative word-of-mouth behaviors: An investigation across three service categories. Academy of Marketing Science, (Winter), 18, 1, 1-15.
- Spreng, R.A., Harrell, G.D. & Mackoy, R.D. (1995) Service recovery: impact on Satisfaction and intentions. Journal of Service Marketing, (January), 9, 1, 15-23.
- White, M L. (1993) Doing the right things right the first time. Trusts & Estates, (September), 132,9, 30-36.
- Zemke, R. & Bell, C. (1990) Service recovery: Doing it right the second time. Training (June), 27, 6, 42-48.

## **Appendix A**

The interview questions

A summarize of the interview questions and the staff responding the questions



## The interview questions

1. How often do you have customer complaints?
2. How do you encourage customer feedback?
3. What types of customer complaints were the most common?
4. What were the factors that contribute to those problems?
5. Was it because of the staff or the system?
6. If those problems were caused by staff, then was it due to
  - Training
  - Empowerment
  - Motivation
7. If those problems were caused by system, then was it due to
  - Work descriptions
  - Organization
8. How did you deal with those problems?

## A summary of the interview questions and the staff responding the question

Interview Questions	Summary of the answers
I. How often customer complaints	Daily
II. How to encourage customer feedback	Guest comment cards Suggestion boxes Guest satisfaction survey
III. Areas of customer complaints Front desk Service failure  Reservation  Restaurant Service failure  Atmosphere  Housekeeping Condition of guest room	Unfriendly front desk staff Staff in efficiency Check out speed Check in speed  Non-smoking king-size bedroom  Slow service  Condition of restaurant Dark Old lounge Quality of food cold coffee  Bathroom cleanliness Tub and tile cleanliness Bedroom cleanliness Condition of bedspread
IV. Problem Staff  System	High turnover Promoted Relocated  Training Empowerment Motivation
VI. How the Marriott Thruway Hotel recover customer complaints	Set up individual team for each complaints

## **Appendix B:** The Marriott control charts from 1996 – 1997

Appendix B1: Overall staff efficiency

Appendix B2: Friendly front desk clerk

Appendix B3: Check out speed

Appendix B4: Check in speed

Appendix B5: Condition of the restaurant

Appendix B6: Overall bedroom cleanliness

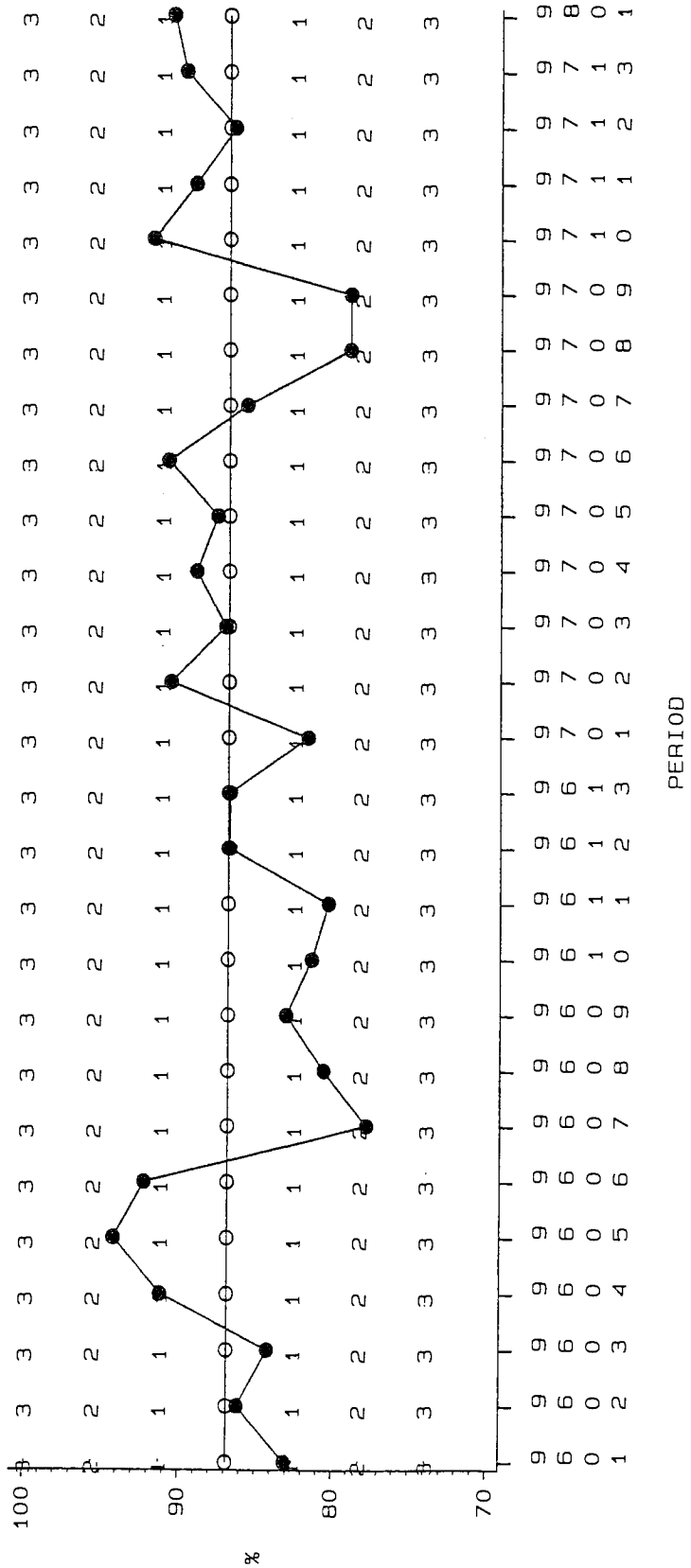
Appendix B7: Overall tub and tile cleanliness

Appendix B8: Overall bathroom cleanliness

Appendix B9: Condition of the bedspread

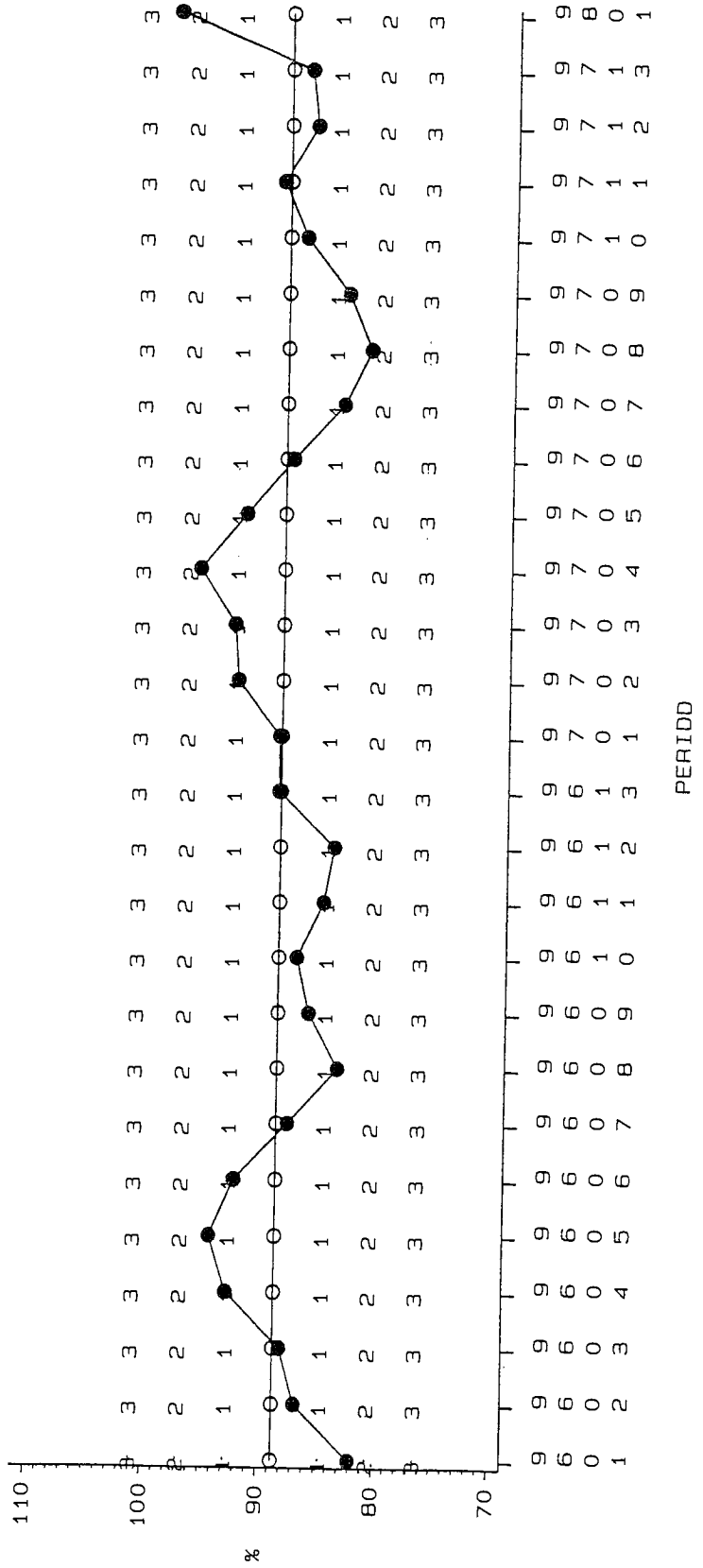
# OVERALL STAFF EFFICIENCY

CONTROL CHART - PERCENT EXCELLENT  
HOTEL=333 Rochester Thru



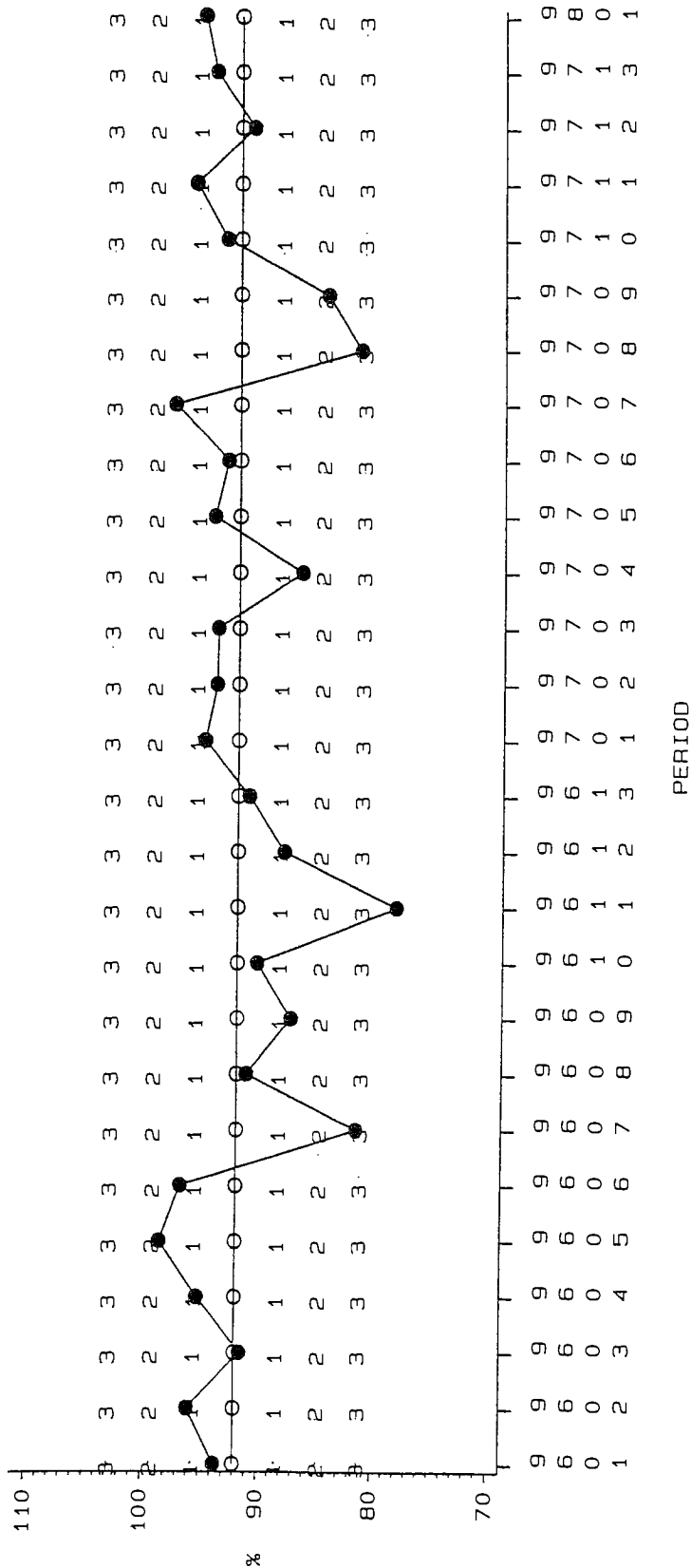
# FRIENDLY FRONT DESK CLERK

CONTROL CHART - PERCENT EXCELLENT  
HOTEL=333 Rochester Thru



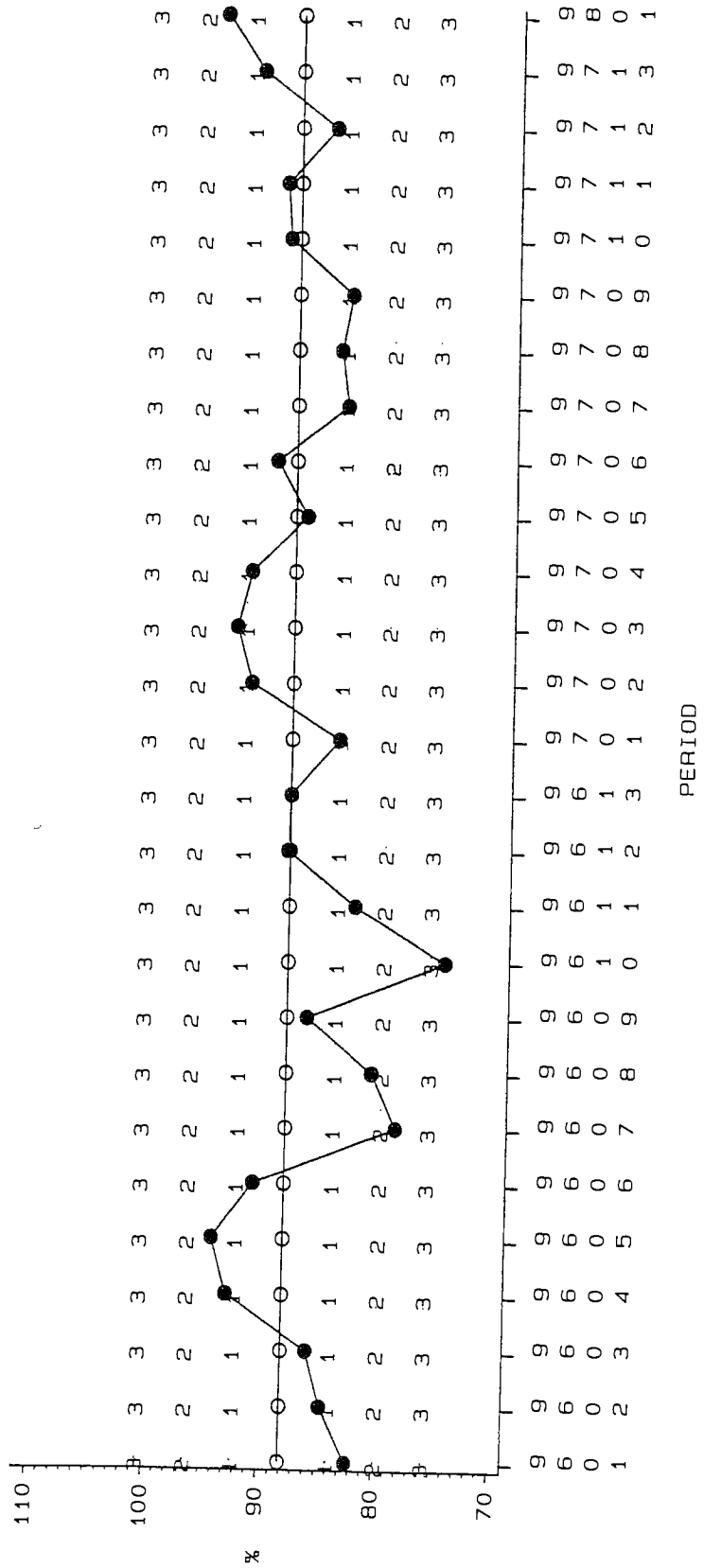
# CHECK OUT SPEED

CONTROL CHART - PERCENT EXCELLENT  
HOTEL-333 Rochester Thru



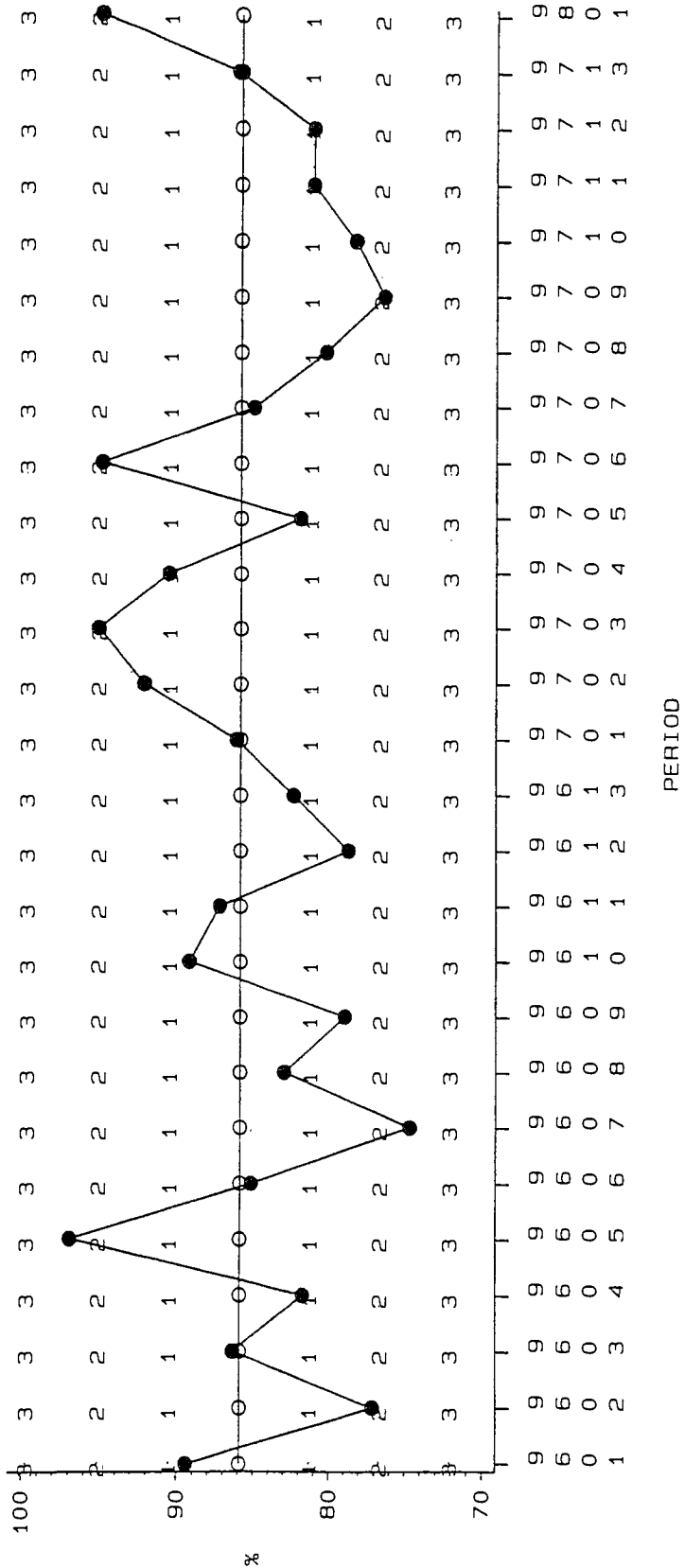
# CHECK IN SPEED

CONTROL CHART - PERCENT EXCELLENT  
HOTEL=333 Rochester Thru



# CONDITION OF THE RESTAURANTS

CONTROL CHART - PERCENT EXCELLENT  
HOTEL=333 Rochester Thru

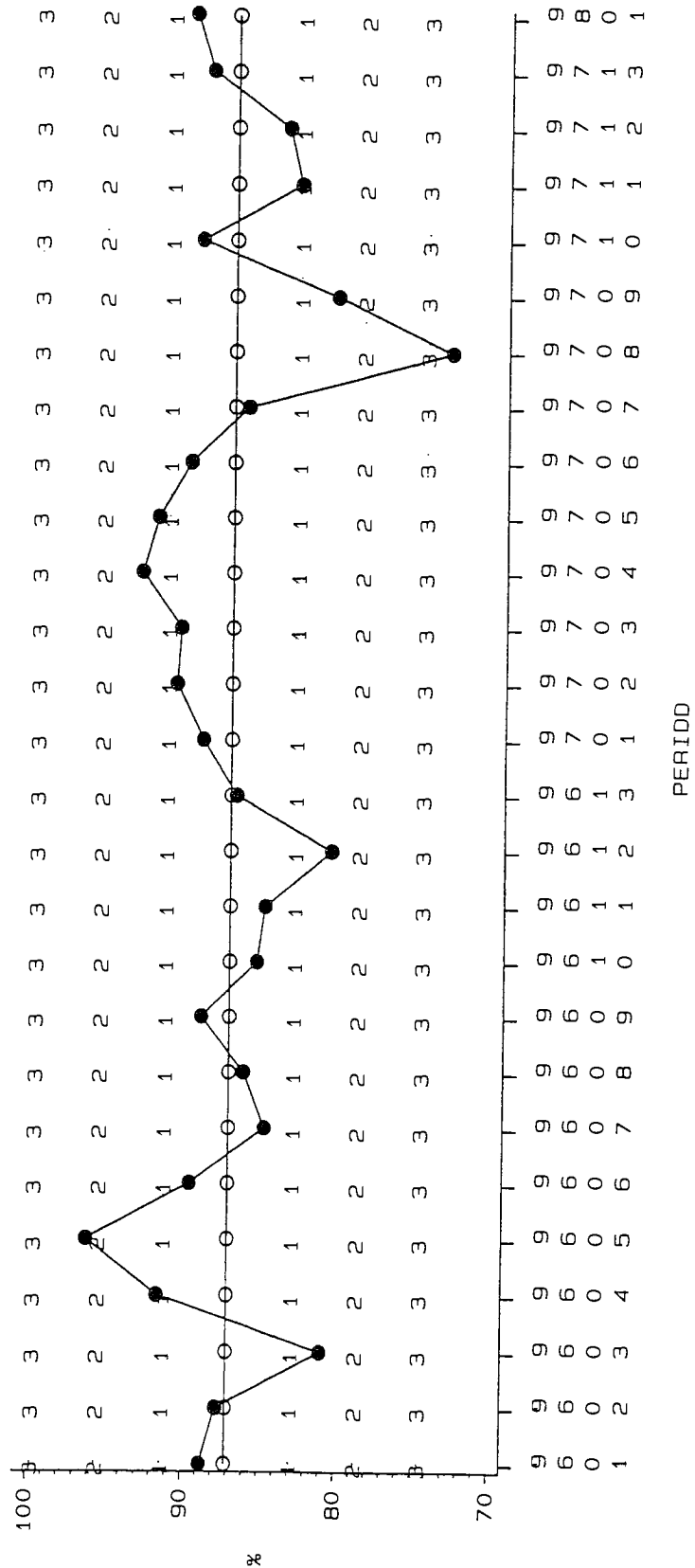




# Appendix A6

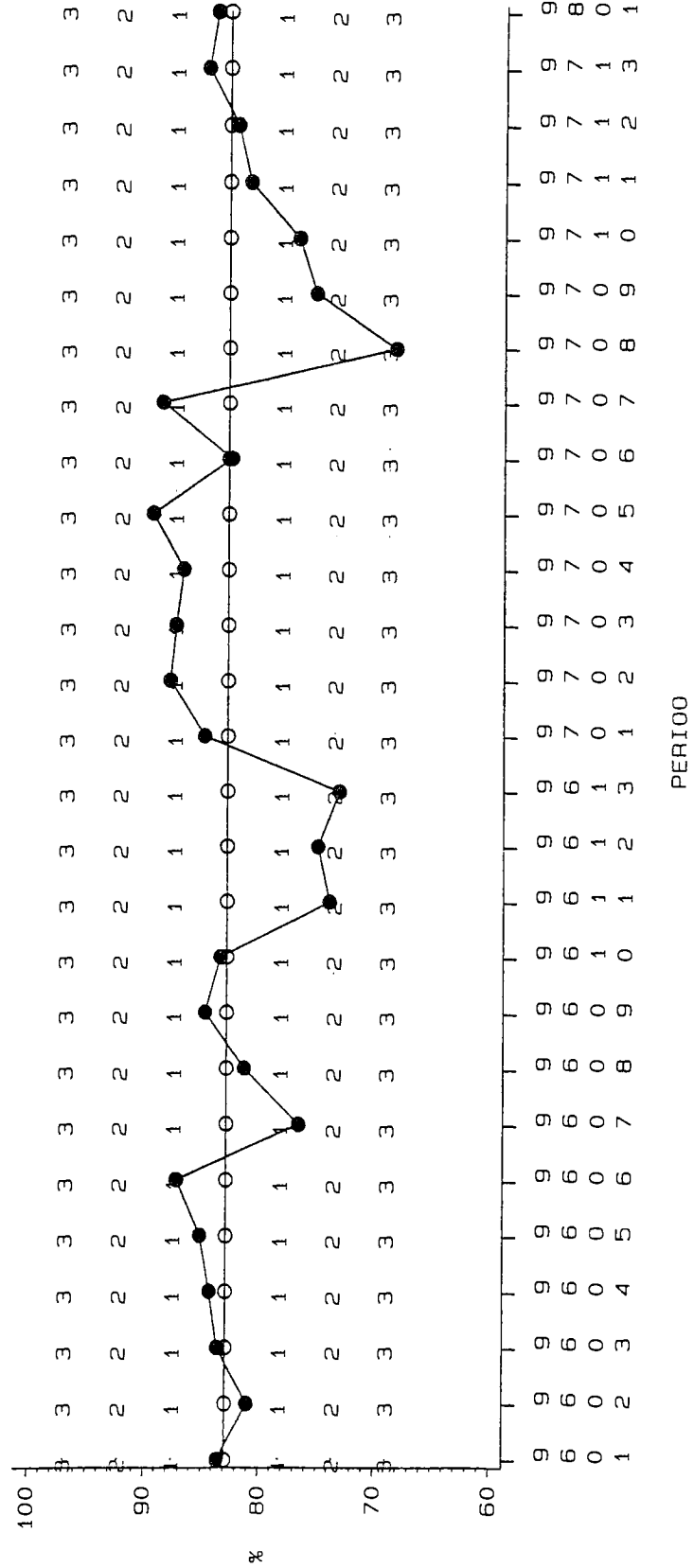
## OVERALL BEDROOM CLEANLINESS

CONTROL CHART - PERCENT EXCELLENT  
HOTEL=333 Rochester Thru



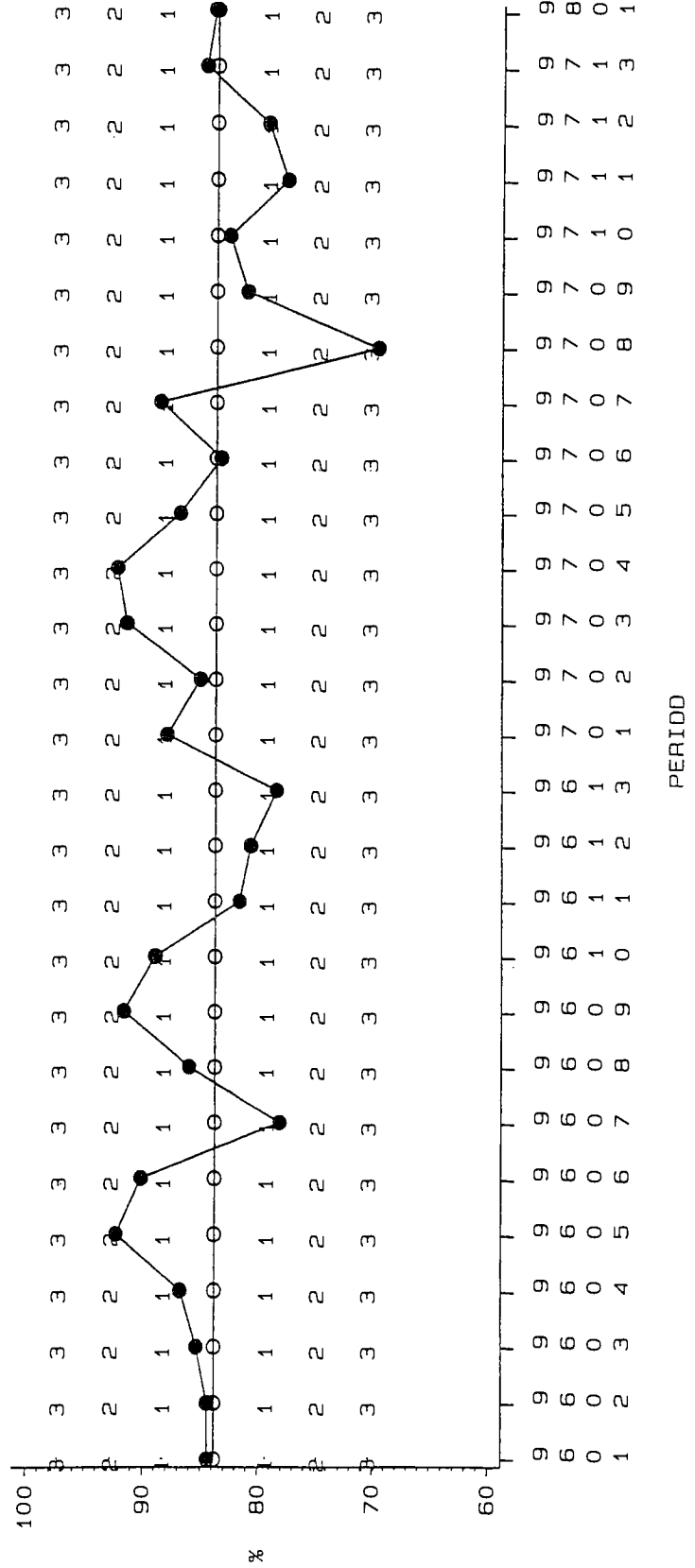
# OVERALL TUB AND TILE CLEANLINESS

CONTROL CHART - PERCENT EXCELLENT  
HOTEL=333 Rochester Thru



# OVERALL BATHROOM CLEANLINESS

CONTROL CHART - PERCENT EXCELLENT  
HOTEL=333 Rochester Thru



# CONDITION OF THE BEDSPREAD

CONTROL CHART - PERCENT EXCELLENT  
HOTEL=333 Rochester Thru

